

AN ANNOTATED LIST OF WALMAJARI AND MANGALA NAMES FOR NATURAL FEATURES, PLANTS AND ANIMALS IN THE GREAT SANDY DESERT, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Sandy Desert of Australia lies in the northern part of Western Australia between Latitudes 17° and 23° S and Longitudes 120° and 129° E and has been inhabited for at least ten thousand years (Jones 1987) by Aborigines. During July 1996, the Discovery '96 Expedition (Hewitt 1997) visited the area, accompanied by some of the Aborigines who had been born there. The expedition operated from base camp Pegasus, (Figure 1) for 14 days, with field trips to surrounding areas including day visits to Pikarungu (Joanna Spring), Kurriny (Gring Spring), and extended trips to Kurriji pa Yajula (Dragon Tree and Elizabeth Soaks). This paper documents as much of the knowledge and features important to survival in the desert as we could obtain during the two weeks in the field. The Aboriginal names for these features, plants and animals are given in the Mangala and Walmajari languages, even when absolute scientific identification of the organisms was not possible, often because parts critical for identification, flowers or fruits, were not available during the visit.

METHODS

The peoples originally occupying these areas spoke Kaarjari, Mangala, and

Walmajari (Figure 1). At the request of the Kimberley Land Council, who are currently negotiating native title claims on behalf of these peoples, no boundaries to these language areas are shown on Figure 1. The Kaarjari speakers occupied land extending inland from the coast, overlapping with the western portion of the land occupied by the Mangala speakers. People speaking Walmajari lived farther east again, overlapping the Mangala range. Most of the peoples speaking these languages now live at the communities of Bidyadanga (formerly La Grange mission), Looma and other communities in and around Fitzroy Crossing, making occasional visits to their tribal lands. The information was gathered mainly with the help of three people: Kurrupa, Gail Smiler, and Mervyn Nampukarti. Kurrupa's people were the Walmajari; he lived as a hunter gatherer until his mid teens when he came out of the desert. Gail is also a Walmajari and she has extensive knowledge in these areas. Mervyn was brought up in the desert and his people are the Mangala; he also brought his teenage daughter Gemma, to show her the country. The presence of the linguist, Eirlys Richards, who is familiar with the languages and their spelling, was of great assistance to us. Details of the expedition, its itinerary and its other activities are given in the report of the expedition (Hewitt 1997).

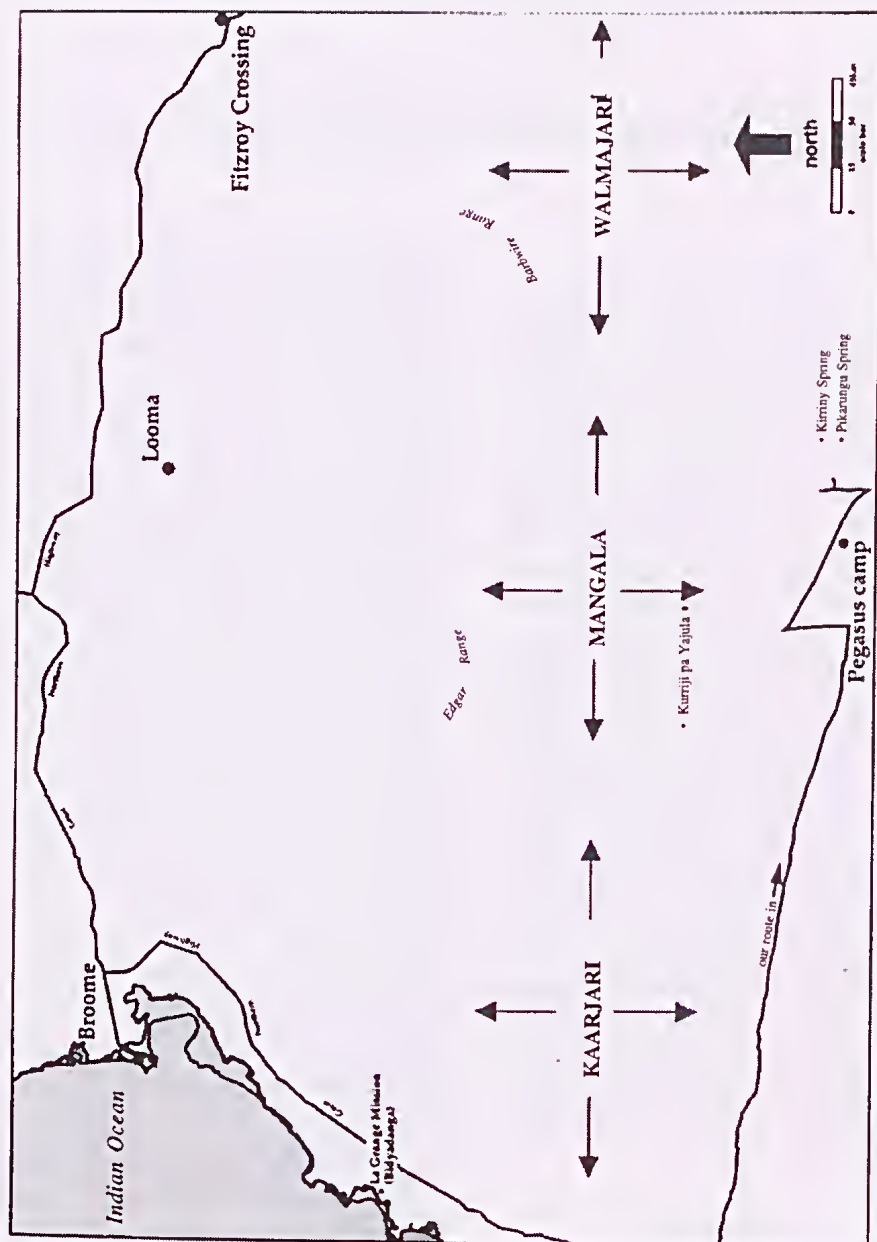


Figure 1. Map showing the locations of 'Discovery '96 Expedition' base camp (Pegasus) and sites visited. Also indicated are the three regions originally occupied by the Kaarjari, Mangala and Walmajari speakers.

KNOWLEDGE LIST

The following are descriptions and Walmajari/Mangala names for some of the plants, animals, skills and other features of life in the Great Sandy Desert shared with us by Gail, Kurrupa and Mervyn. Instances where many names were applicable suggests heightened importance, as the item may have been utilised in many ways or been used in particular phases.

Features and Activities

Fire – The making of fire was an important survival skill for food preparation and also many other processes such as implement and weapon manufacture. Two different types of wood were used, Yarun (*Eucalyptus terminalis*) and Kulparn (*Acacia tumida*), one held in the hands and the other, softer one, on the ground to be rubbed by the first. This was done firmly and vigorously while blowing, and administering sawdust and small amounts of spinifex. When heat, air and fuel were sufficient a flame developed.

Jilji (Walmajari). The dune tops or ridges.

Julu (Walmajari). A stand of Yarun trees clumped fairly closely together on a mound of soil such as those seen around false Discovery Well. Mound dimensions were approximately 7m in diameter and 1m high.

Karlaka (Walmajari) – The term used for honey. This was produced by native bees, which used hollows in trees as a hive site. When bees were found the tree was tapped or knocked from the hollow entrance downwards with a stick or tomahawk. A change in sound indicated where the hive was. A scarf like cut was then made in the tree and the honey was removed.

Kurrkuminti (Walmajari) – A type of hollow in a sandhill, which was often used as a camp site, especially in cooler weather.

Parpara (Walmajari). The wide swales (lower ground) between the dunes.

Pikarungu – (Mangala) – Joanna Springs.

Purntarrpurntarr or bundar bundar – (Walmajari). An area of vegetation which indicated a waterhole.

Kurriji pa Yajula – Dragon Tree Soak and Elizabeth Soak, (Mangala) – said as one. (Elizabeth soak was not a gazetted name. Ian Bull named it after his mother when he “found” it in 1981). The site is an A class Conservation Reserve.

Wujuwaju (Walmajari). The narrow swales (lower ground) between the dunes.

Great Sandy Desert Plants

Jalirr (Walmajari) – bush onion. *Cyperus bulbosus*. Also known as Ngarijijarti, Jurnta. Also WupaWupa (Orbaorba) and Wirrparn (Wirpun) in Walmadjari and Mangala. This bulb was from a small clumped grass with little tubers, very onion like in form. It was cooked on hot coals covered in not very hot ashes, rubbed to remove skin and tasted like peanut.

Jalngu (Walmajari) – spinifex. This soft grass was woven into a ring forming a pad and used to help balance water carried on one's head.

Janiya (Walmajari) – wild pear. *Persoonia falcata*. The fruit could be eaten.

Jijoo or Wirtuka (Walmajari) – *Ipomea* species – bush potato. The presence of this species was an indicator of nearby water. It grew to about 1m high. The tap root was somewhat like a sweet

potato, and was dug out, cooked and eaten. Young ones were best. The dark berries were not eaten.

Jitartu (Mangala) – soft spinifex. This was used for conserving water on long trips; tufts of it were placed in the vessel containing water to minimise spillage. It was also dipped into the water and sucked for drinking.

Junyju (Walmajari) – Eucalypt species. The leaves of this tree were used as a whistle.

Jurntijartu or jurntini or majapurti (Walmajari) – puffball fungus – *Pisolithus tinctorius*. Also known as Majapurti by people from Wangkatjunka. The inner parts of these fungi were eaten when they were still moist, either raw or on the fire. They made the tongue go black. They were apparently still in season in July/August, though most seemed dry. The dry powdery parts of the fungi were used as a type of talcum powder, such as for rashes at the top of the legs.

Karrpukarrajarti (Walmajari) – tuft grass species – *Xerochloa barbata*. When preparing the seeds for consumption they were first yandied (a process of sifting and sorting done with a variety of swirling and shaking actions in an open elongated wooden dish) and then wet ground and cooked.

Kirli or Jili (Walmajari). Low vine-like prickly bush near waterholes. Usually near 'jila' – permanent waterholes.

Kulparn (Walmajari) – *Acacia tumida*. The seeds were cooked and eaten like a vegetable. Select pieces of wood from this plant were also used to start a fire by rubbing with wood from the yarun. This plant also sometimes housed an edible grub, or larvae, in the tap root. Small piles of fine sawdust were looked for around the wood at the base of the tree, which indicated the presence of a

grub. The main tap root was then exposed and the grub was located. It had a nutty taste.

Kurlulungkurr (Walmajari) – *Tinaspora smilacina*. This strong creeper climber with red berries was used for making a sandal footwear.

Kurrangany (Walmajari) – shrub. Small bush with purple pea shaped flower. Warts on leaves indicated water nearby.

Marral Marral (Walmajari) – *Erythrophleum chlorostachys*. Honey was sucked from the flowers of this tree. It flowered in the summertime, in the rainy season.

Marnta (Walmajari) – Sap/gum. Gum from Coolabah and Desert Walnut. This gum was chewed for a snack, and was also sourced from another species of *Acacia* called Pinkalyi (Walmadjari) or Minta (Mangala).

Ngarakarra (Walmajari) – *Gyrostemon tepperi*. This plant was used by placing it on a fire to smoke babies so as to make them strong and ward off illnesses.

Ngarlka (Walmajari) – see Turtujarti.

Ngujarna (Walmajari) – tuft grass species. This small grass had red seeds which were used for making flour.

Parntal (Mangala) – Desert Walnut – *Owenia reticulata*. See Turtujarti.

Turtujarti (Walmajari) – Desert Walnut – *Owenia reticulata*. The nuts from this tree were called Ngarlka (Nulgu), and were gathered from where they have fallen on the ground. The nuts lie on the ground for a long time and may become powdery inside as a result of termites; these were no good (Mirily). Good nuts (Makaly) were collected, sorted by banging on the knee and then shaken near the ear to listen (or feel?) for a looseness or rattle. This was difficult to detect for the unskilled.

A bed of coals was prepared and the nuts were cooked by covering them with the coals and stirring occasionally. The nuts "talked" while they were cooking a slight popping sound, and when this stopped they were cooked. They were removed from the fire and cooled by covering with sand for a short while, then individually cracked open. About half these nuts were cast aside. After cooking, the broken nut inside was eaten. The unripe nuts were called Karraparra, and the flower was called Wurrupu.

Wirajarti or Rawarawa (Walmajari) – *Hakea subora*. The creamy coloured flowers were sucked for honey.

Witulurra (Walmajari) – shrub. Waxy red star shaped flowers, roots like potatoes which were eaten.

Yarun (Walmajari) – *Eucalyptus terminalis*. Found on dunes and ridges. Galls caused by parasitic insects formed nut-like growths called tartaku (duddugo). These were about 25mm in diameter and were edible. The nut-like growth was picked off the tree and cracked open; the inside layer, which looks and tastes similar to coconut, was eaten as was the larvae inside. A natural indentation hole (an eye) at the bottom meant it was good, as did being heavy. Sometimes these nuts had holes bored in their sides which indicated that they were no good. This was where the insect had matured and left the gall. The flower was called Kurrulpiyan.

Great Sandy Desert Animals

Jajalpi (Walmajari) – Mulgara – *Dasyurus cristicauda*. Also known as Minyiparnta.

Lumpurru (Walmajari) – King Brown Snake – *Pseudechis australis*.

Mantararrarrararra (Walmajari and

Mangala) – Marsupial Mole – *Notoryctes typhlops*.

Mingajurra (Walmajari) – Golden Bandicoot – *Isodon auratus*. This species was no longer present. It also was known in Walmajari as Walkarraja, Miningarna, Mulyajuka, Jurungu.

Mirtululu (Walmajari) – Bilby – *Macrotis lagotis*.

NgarlNgarl (Walmajari) – Northern Quoll – *Dasyurus hallucatus*. This species was no longer present. Also known in Walmajari as Parrjita.

Ngujamili (Walmajari) – Youngson's Dunnart – *Sminthopsis youngsoni*. Though not a highly sought after food, these were sometimes cooked over an open fire. Also known in Walmajari as Warlungintintinti or Warlukarpirnjuwal.

Nyulkulku (Walmajari) – Cat – *Felis catus*.

Pinkirrjarti (Walmajari) – Australian Bustard – *Ardeotis australis*.

Raltartu or Majirri (Walmajari) – Hare wallaby species no longer present.

Waltaki (Walmajari) – Fox – *Vulpes vulpes*.

Warlu Ngintinginti (Mangala) – see Ngujamili.

Wilika (Walmajari) – Spinifex Hopping Mouse – *Notomys alexis*. Known as Kanpirriny by Mangala people.

Wirinkuma (Walmajari) – Northern Brushtail Possum – *Trichosurus arnhemensis*. Also known as tart or wayurta. It ate flowers of bloodwood called ngaak.

Wirlka (Walmajari) – Goulds' Sand Goanna – *Varanus gouldii*. Flushed from hiding and hit over the head with a stick. The goanna was then gutted by a small incision near the neck and cooked on hot coals.

The abundance of food sources in the Great Sandy Deasert varied from season to season, both for animals and plants. Of the plant species recorded and collected on the expedition, 10 species were found which were previously unlisted in the area by the Western Australian Herbarium. These include *Grevillea erythroclada*, *Hakea subora*, *Heliotropium epacridium*, *Ptilotus polystachyus*, *Panicum whitei*, *Paspalidium vaginatum*, *Plectrachne melvillei*, an *Ipomea* species, *Eucalyptus terminalis*, and a fungus of the *Pisolithus* genus. The specimen of the *Ipomea* species, usually only found near water, was found in a very large natural hollow in a dune. This hollow, or kurrkuminti, was perhaps 70m long, 35m wide, 10m deep and about 250m N/E of Kirriny Spring. Kurrkumintis were known to be favourite camp sites, offering shelter from the prevalent easterly wind (Lowe and Pike 1990).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Discovery expedition, and our role within it, would not have been possible without the assistance we received. The contributions of the following are gratefully acknowledged: the Kimberley Land Council for access to the area,

Kurrupa, Gail and Mervyn who generously imparted their knowledge of the desert and the linguist Eirlys Richards who was with us in the field, provided much information, Michelle Drew and Christopher Spurr who were our companions throughout the expedition, David Hewitt – expedition organiser and leader, Australian Geographic, the CSIRO Science and Industry Endowment Fund, the Western Australian Herbarium, Landrover Australia, Jenny Brett – Sandfire Roadhouse, Michael and Jill Tubby – Agricultural Protection Board, Marble Bar, the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management for permits (bb00093l, swo04045), and all those others who were involved or assisted.

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